Message from our Chair

Shumei S. Sun, PhD
W. Hans Carter Professor and Chair
Director, Biomedical Informatics, VCU CTSA

Thanks to all who made our Biostatistics Retreat a resounding success. Special thanks to Mr. Russell Boyle who organized the Retreat. A bouquet of gratitude goes out to Dr. Roy Sabo who guided the discussions that generated our updated Departmental mission statement, which is printed below.

Roy performed double duty in leading the members of the Curriculum Committee and the rest of the faculty in discussions of revamping our course offerings to include spatial regression and longitudinal data analysis. These additional courses are being offered after the Curriculum Committee undertook a rewarding examination of Biostatistics course offerings at ten universities across the country and performed an informative poll of nearly five-score Department alumni. A gratifying discovery of these investigations was that our state-of-the-art high-throughput data analysis course offerings are second to none.

The Retreat morphed into the idea of initiating a Biostatistics Journal Club, the meeting frequency of which is to be determined. Jessica Ketchum composed a thoughtful e-mail message outlining what the purview of such a journal club should be. In view of her expressed interest, I have asked her to organize the Club. We’re all looking forward to a string of successful journal club meetings.

Did you know?

The mission of the VCU Department of Biostatistics is to improve human health through methodological research, the education of graduate students and health science researches in biostatistical methods and applications, and collaborative health sciences research. We conduct methodological research motivated by collaborative alliances, which in turn contributes to and enhances our educational mission.
Dr. Roy T. Sabo had a productive start to his career since joining the Department of Biostatistics in the summer of 2008. He has published on a variety of statistical topics, including longitudinal data analysis and Bayesian methods, and has even published on such medical and public health topics as diabetes, environmental chemical exposures, obesity and cardiovascular disease. He has presented his methodological research at both the East North American Region (ENAR) meetings of the International Biometric Society and the Joint Statistical Meetings (JSM) of the American Statistical Association, among others. In addition, his work in non-statistical fields has been presented or displayed at international conferences for obesity and bone marrow transplant.

In no area are Roy’s efforts more noticeable than in his contributions to the Biostatistics graduate program. He led a group tasked with analyzing and revamping the entire course catalogue. The committee identified or added important new courses to the current curriculum, improved the names and descriptions for several courses and outlined several other areas for improvement. Roy then facilitated the process for drafting a mission statement for the Department. He received the 2011 Department of Biostatistics' Teaching Excellence Award. He spent the last summer writing a textbook for his Biostatistical Methods course sequence. In the near future, Roy plans to continue revamping the Biostatistical Methods course sequence, in addition to serving as advisor to biostatistical graduate students, focusing on such topics as environmental chemical exposure and clinical trial design. He is working with several researchers and graduate students throughout the University in the development of adaptive clinical trial designs, and hopes to have several manuscripts and presentations ready for the new year.

Yvonne F. Hargrove, Administrative Office Manager

Mrs. Yvonne F. Hargrove graduated from J. Sergeant Reynolds Community College in the spring of 1975 with an Associate’s Degree in secretarial sciences. After graduating she explored opportunities a few blocks away at the Medical College of Virginia. Dr. S. James Kilpatrick, Jr., former Chair, offered the job to her the same day of her interview. The job was accepted shortly thereafter, and Yvonne started working for the Department on July 14, 1975.

Yvonne works very closely with the Department's graduate program as a large part of her job. She prepares teaching/course schedules and calendars, final exam schedules, records grades and manages the comprehensive and qualifying exam process. Yvonne is very student-oriented and remains available to our students at all times. Yvonne has been a great resource for preparing new student orientation and helping new students get acclimated to the department. Beyond helping the graduate program, Yvonne is the office manager for the administrative needs of faculty and staff.

Quotes from Yvonne:

“During my tenure in this department, I have met a lot of people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. I really enjoy interacting with the faculty and students. Things have really changed a great deal. I used to use a magnetic card typewriter and carbon paper - now I use a desktop computer with dual monitors, which has been a big change for me!”

"It's been a long journey. My husband, Charles, and our two daughters, Michelle and Candace, have supported me all the way. This year I celebrated 36 years in the Department and I don't plan to stop now!"
Tobias Guennel is a fifth-year PhD candidate currently working on his dissertation. He joined the Longwood University tennis team in 2004 on a tennis scholarship before a summer internship with Dr. Kellie J. Archer in 2006 convinced him to apply to the Biostatistics PhD program at VCU. Since studying at VCU he has gained much research experience. He has been a pre-doctoral fellow on Dr. Mike Neale’s National Institute for Drug Abuse training grant since 2010. His research focuses on developing novel normalization and analysis methodology for high-throughput genomic assays such as microarrays and next-generation sequencers. Tobias has recently collaborated on a project with Dr. Nenad Sestan at Yale University working on the spatiotemporal transcriptome of the human brain. This project, with guidance from Tobias’ dissertation advisor Dr. Mark Reimers, has led to a co-authorship publication in Nature. He also collaborates with Dr. Xiangning Chen's lab working on analyzing RNA-Seq data to identify risk genes for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Tobias was also faculty for the Integrative Statistical Analysis of Genome Scale Data workshop at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories. There he taught statistical methodologies to renowned international scientists for the past two years.

In his free time, Tobias serves in various leadership roles at VCU, most notably as the President of the Graduate Student Association and as a member of the VCU Alumni Association's Board of Directors. For his service to the University, he recently received the VCU Leadership Award and the MCV Alumni Association of VCU Scholarship for outstanding leadership and academic achievements.
DEPARTMENT LAURELS

Honors

Dr. Roy T. Sabo, Assistant Professor, won the Department’s Outstanding Teacher Award for the 2010-2011 academic year.

Antonio D. Gaines, Financial Specialist and Personnel Administrator, was appointed to the University Hearing Board for the 2011-12 academic year.

Tobias Guennel, PhD candidate, received the MCV Alumni Association of VCU Scholarship, VCU’s University Leadership Award and made the Who’s Who Among Students in American Universities list.

Caroline Carr, PhD student, won Outstanding Presentation at the 2011 Annual Society of Toxicology meeting in the Mixtures Specialty Section.

Recent graduates

PhD in Biostatistics, December 2010

Dr. Maria Capparuccini is currently staying at home and taking care of her two young children, including a newborn.

Dr. Tina Cunningham is an Assistant Professor in the Public Health Department at Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, VA.

Dr. Andre Williams is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Biostatistics and Bioinformatics at National Jewish Health in Denver, CO.

MS in Clinical Research & Biostatistics, May 2011

Dr. Kelly Sawyer is an Assistant Professor and Associate Research Director in the Department of Emergency Medicine at Oakland University’s William Beaumont School of Medicine in Rochester, MI.

Shamsur Chowdhury is currently a Senior Fellow in the Pediatric Cardiac Intensive Care Fellowship Program at the Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, PA.

Newly awarded grants & contracts, 2011 calendar year

Jessica M. Ketchum, PhD

Co-I on VCU Presidential Research Initiative Program award entitled “Veteran to Veteran: Developing Positive Futures via Enhancement of Resiliency Skills” with Dr. Amy Armstrong of Rehab Counseling as PI.

Co-I on VCU International Partnerships Major Initiatives Award entitled “Israeli/American Resilience Project: Enhancing Resilience Following Trauma” with Dr. Carolyn E. Hawley of Rehab Counseling as PI.

Yongyun Shin, PhD

PI on VCU sub-award with the University of Chicago entitled “Improving Studies of the Impact of Group Level Interventions on Program Quality & Youth Outcomes” with Dr. Stephen Raudenbush as PI.

Leroy Thacker, PhD

Co-I on NIDDK/National Institutes of Health R01 award entitled “Spectrum of Neuro-Cognitive Impairment in Cirrhosis” with Dr. Jasmohan Bajaj of Internal Medicine (Gastroenterology) as PI.

Co-I on Rock Creek Pharmaceuticals award entitled “Planning Grant for Studies to Test the Hypothesis that Anatabine is an Effective and Safe Anti-Inflammatory” with Dr. Richard K. Sterling of Internal Medicine (Gastroenterology) as PI.

Wen Wan, PhD

Co-I on Virginia Community Health Research Board award entitled “The Role of MRE11/RAD50/NBS1 in ER/PR/HER2 Negative Breast Pre-cancer Progression” with Dr. Aylin Rizki of Radiation Oncology as PI.

Co-I on Virginia Community Health Research Board award entitled “Sequential Common Gamma Chain Cytokines can Expand Tumor Antigen-reactive T-cells that are Resistant to Cancer” with Dr. Jasmohan Bajaj of Internal Medicine (Gastroenterology) as PI.
Announcements

Thanks to Gayle Spivey, Yvonne Hargrove and Debbie Puzzo for organizing this year’s Biostatistics Picnic in the Park, which was held in September at Forest Hill Park.

Newsletter name

Congratulations to Hanan Hammouri for creating the name of our newly established newsletter. Hanan, a PhD student, received the highest number of votes during the naming contest. Thanks to everyone who contributed names and voted!

The Department moved to the One Capitol Square building on the corner of 9th & Main Streets in May 2011. Please note our new address below:

Department of Biostatistics
One Capitol Square, 7th Floor
830 East Main Street
Richmond, VA 23219

P.O. Box 980032
Phone: 804-828-9824
Fax: 804-828-8900

New hires

David Wheeler, MS, MPH, PhD

Dr. Wheeler joins VCU from the National Cancer Institute, where he was a Cancer Prevention Fellow. Dr. Wheeler holds a M.S. in Statistics and a Ph.D. in Geography, with a specialization in spatial statistics, from Ohio State University, and an M.P.H. with a concentration in quantitative methods from Harvard University. His recent research includes developing and applying statistical methods to investigate spatial-temporal variation in cancer risk and applying data mining methods to explain and predict expert occupational exposure assessments used in evaluating risk factors in epidemiologic studies of cancer.

Kevin A. Caillouet, PhD
rejoined the Department in July 2011 as a Post-Doctoral Trainee on Dr. Chris Gennings’ NIH training grant.

Zirui Gu, MS joined the Department in July 2011 as a Research Assistant working with Dr. Guimin Gao.

Shudong Wang, PhD joined the Department in July 2011 as a Post-Doctoral Fellow assisting with Dr. Guimin Gao’s research.